WILL A MONTH IN AN ASYLUM DRIVE PORTER CHARLTON INSANE?

The Predicament That Italian Justice Has Devised for American Wife-Murderer—if He Doesn't Go Mad He'll Have to Stand Trial for His Life, and if He Loses Senses He'll be Committed for Rest of His Days.

BY WINIFRED VAN DUZER.

JUST the thud, thud of mallet on yielding flesh; the limpness of the chilling body; the scraping of that hideous trunk—scraping through eternity along the heart of his soul; sinister circles whirling on the mirror of Como, whirling round and round the secret shared with the night, and a hand flashing whitely at the side of a boat.

Just the memory with corroding fingers and sleepless eyes—God, its eyes!—standing at the window, hovering in the darkness, rising up in the haunted sunshine! Clearer, sharper, more physical as the days mill by; new lines here, new shadows there, mysteries! Before him the hand that held the mallet. He thrust it out of sight.

And all about him those who walk in shadows, rambling over their dreams; chuckling at vapory pleasures, weeping, praying for the light that will never come. And weaklings among the insane, who sit silently with their poor, vacant faces turned to him. And across the court, from a window where the bars are heavy, the shrieking of the tortured thing who killed; shrieking as measured, mechanical as a pendulum, swinging with the pulse of his being. The tortured thing who killed.

PORTER CHARLTON
PHOTOS BY BAIN

MRS. MARY CASTLE CHARLTON

And he had killed and he was tortured by a memory with corroding fingers and sleepless eyes. He dragged his chair to the window and pressed his forehead against the cold stone.

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COMO is at its best now. April, misty with passion and languor, hangs over distant mountains, settles in turquoise mists on greening fields, weaves upon the bosom of the lake in gold and purple brocades. Black green as the hoary cheeks of time are the olive groves; the ancient cathedral is a fairy etching on the crystal air; from every belfry of the twelve churches comes the call to life and love.

But the call strikes dully on the walls of the old asylum on the hillside with out the city. Dull are the gray stones, the barred windows, the winter-deadened ivy clambering to the roof. Dull are the ears of those in the cells and the long wards—those who walk in shadows. Dull are the eyes that gaze longingly upon springtime in the valley; dull are the hearts that beat in the void of mockery.

And dull is the heart of Porter Charlton as his dimming eyes turn toward the world beyond the window bars, watching the sun rise beyond the snow-capped heights in the east and creep slowly upward over his prison; creep swiftly downward to a glory of the gods that is the west, where is the home of his childhood, and his white-haired father and his mother's grave. Slowly, slowly the days pass, every day as the day before, with the sun climbing the Alps to the zenith, dropping into the west. No hope, no happiness. Only the memory, with corroding fingers and sleepless eyes, hovering in the mists of the valley, haunting the velvet darkness of the lake, clinging. All around him maniacs and weaklings, harmless creatures who laugh and babble meaningless words hour after hour. Over him the shadow of the law, biding its time.

Charlton has been in the detention home two years. After trusting Lake Como with his dark secret five years ago, he fled to New York—his home. But the lake gave up the secret and the wheels of the law began to turn. Charlton's father, noted New York attorney, fought extradition. But the United States supreme court turned him over to Italy two years ago. The government held him while its probe, like a long finger of light, was thrust here and there, turned half way round the world to California and the west. And finally it dragged out the hideous trunk that Lake Como surrendered, with its dry, brown stains, and held it before him.

"I killed her," he said calmly then, and the light in his eyes was like the weird, reflected light from moving water. "I beat her to death with a statue of Venus. Her flesh was soft; the blows were muffled. I hid her body in a trunk. At midnight I dragged the trunk to a pier near the house. It scraped on the earth." His hunted eyes with the hideously reflected light turned restlessly to each side, over his shoulder. "I dropped it in the lake," he went on. "I didn't think they'd find it. Then I came home."

After the confession the Italian government ordered the boy into an Italian asylum. It seemed necessary, it was said, to allow a proper mental examination. That light in his eyes—the convulsive "I loved her—loved her!" Was he sane? Why had he killed his wife whom he loved?

And so the most famous investigation ever conducted in Italy came to an end, and a trial that promised to be unique among trials for crime was looked forward to with morbid interest by the public and with professional interest by physicians, alienists, sociologists. Charlton at one time in his life was affected with mental aberrations and acute dipsomania. His grandmother died of alcoholism. His great-uncle was a paranoiac. His younger brother accidentally shot and killed a playmate. Mary Scott Castle Charlton, the investigation showed, was erotically insane. Their love, therefore, was a fetid thing of degeneracy, to interest scientists and men who deal with other men. Finally Dr. Valtorti, Italian alienist, directed that Charlton write an account of his early life; of his meeting with the actress whom he married spite of her age; of the night on Lake Como; of his life through the days and nights since.

Wherefore, while April and hope hang on the mountains and the bells call to life and love, the boy sits within the grim old walls of the house where there is no hope, writing of darkness and decay and of a horror that is soul-death; writing with the hand that held the mallet.

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PORTER CHARLTON was romping with "the kids" in the streets of Omaha a dozen years ago. Paul Charlton, leading attorney of the city, was his father; his mother was dead. He was just ten years old.

About that time Mary Scott Castle went on the stage. She was the wife of Neville Castle, a lawyer of San Francisco. But she had thrown his money to the winds; he speculated and lost; finally he was bankrupt. She was erratic, brilliant, restlessness the keynote of her nature. The stage seemed inevitable. From her place as queen of the Golden Gate city's Bohemia, she flitted to the stellar role of "The Princess and the Butterfly."

Lawrence Griffith was an actor in the company. She fell in love with him. She loved him wildly, unreasonably. Her husband secured a divorce. Mrs. Castle went to New York with Griffith. They quarreled violently and incessantly. Finally he broke away from her. She followed him twice across the continent, but her spell was dead.

Porter Charlton was a high school boy in Omaha in 1905. His father, a Yale classmate of William H. Taft, was appointed to the legal department of the bureau of insular affairs. He went to Washington in 1907. Porter followed him to the east and became one of the most promising young bank clerks in the National City bank, New York.

Six months later Mary Scott Castle met William B. Craig, who had taken Griffith's place in her affections, in Peacock Alley at the Waldorf-Astoria, and, drawing a silver-plated revolver, fired at his heart. The bullet struck a fountain pen and caused only a slight injury. The case against her was dropped. She established herself in a small, exclusive hotel.

In January, 1910, Porter Charlton visited her apartments with a friend. He was a boy of twenty-one, looking forward along the years; she was a woman of forty, who had looked backward so long that her eyes were weary. But he loved her and she felt the lust for possession.

At the bank they saw a change in Charlton as the weeks went by. His smile was gone; he grew haggard. One day he telephoned his father. The doctor had told him that he had tuberculosis; he wanted advice.

The father hurried to New York. He found his son with the woman. They were married, they said. Life, the father declared, was over for the boy. But he gave him money to go to Italy. The boy left with the woman to spend a honeymoon in a cottage on the shores of Lake Como.

They were happy, but lonely. They had almost no visitors, and passersby often heard them quarreling in the night, sobbing hysterically, pounding each other with their fists. Charlton became subject to long fits of melancholia, when he walked about with drooping head and listless eyes, speaking to no one. Then there was the night of June 9, 1910.

"We quarreled again." The hand that held the mallet writes firmly, impersonally. "She said things—did things—that drove me to frenzy. She sat on the edge of the bed and looked at me, with that smile on her lips, in her eyes—that smile!

"I picked up a mallet I'd been mending a table with and hit her on the head and shoulders. Her flesh crushed under the blows, it was so soft, so pliant! It sickened me. I caught a statue of Venus from the table and brought it down across her shoulders. The figure shattered. She fell over, dead.

"I looked around. Blood pounded to my temples and along my neck. It sounded as though a drum were beating back of my head. I picked up—It. It was still warm and soft. I couldn't go on. But the drum was beating and there were black clouds and sheets of flame leaping round my feet. So I carried it to an empty trunk and jammed it inside. It bent together. I let the cover fall and locked it. Then I dragged the trunk down the steps and out to the beach. And it scraped along—scraped!" The horror of that noise seems to hang heaviest of all the horror in the mind of the slayer—the sound of the trunk tearing at wood and earth in its grotesque journey to the water.

"I pulled it out to the end of a pier and into a boat. Then I pushed off a little and lifted the trunk over the side. It sank quietly and the water rushed in after it; rings wound round the place where it had gone down; they spread out wider and wider until the water was still again. Then I rowed away. I thought it was over.

"I loved her. I have always loved her. Her memory—God!"

Bird of Evil Omen.

To this day the lapwing is a bird of evil omen among the people of the south of Scotland. This dislike dates from the reign of Charles II, when, during the persecution of the Covenanters, such as sought a hiding place on the moors were commonly discovered to their pursuers by the screams of the lapwings which hovered over them.

Electricity Takes Ships Through Panama Canal

FORTY electric locomotives of unique design are used to tow shipping through the huge locks of the Panama canal. When the canal was being planned it was apparent that the various winch and capstan systems in vogue for towing ships through existing canals and locks would not do at all for Panama. After a thorough study of the entire problem of maneuvering ships through the locks at Panama, it was evident that they could not safely proceed through the locks under their own power, and that a substitute for the ship's power should embrace these requirements:

Ability to place the ship in proper relation to the lock.

Capability for keeping the ship in its course.

Accelerating and retarding the ship without rupturing the lines.

The lines when once attached should be used without change for lockage in flight.

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In passing through the canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a vessel enters the approach channel in Limon bay, which extends to Gatun, a distance of about seven miles. At Gatun it enters a series of three locks in flight and is raised eighty-five feet to the level of Gatun lake. It then steams at full speed through the greater part of the channel in this lake, for a distance of twenty-four miles, to Bas Obispo, where it enters the Culebra cut. It passes through this cut, which has a length of nine miles, and reaches Pedro Miguel, where it enters a lock and is lowered thirty feet. Then it passes through Miraflores lake for a distance of 1½ miles until it reaches Miraflores, where it is lowered fifty-five feet through two locks, to the sea level, after which it passes out into the Pacific through an 8½-mile channel.

The main features of all the lock sites are identical; and the following brief description of the Gatun locks, with special reference to the arrangement of the towing tracks, ship channels, inclines and approaches, gives a clearer conception of the towing scheme in general.

There are two channels at Gatun for traffic in each direction. The channels are separated by a center wall, the total length of which is 6,330 feet. There are two systems of tracks, one for towing and the other for the return of the electric locomotives when returning idle. This, however, refers only to the outer walls. For the center wall, there is only one return track in common for both the towing tracks. The towing tracks are naturally placed next to the channel side and the system of towing utilizes normally not fewer than four locomotives running along the lock walls. Two of them are opposite each other in advance of the vessel, and two run opposite each other following the vessel. The number of locomotives is, however, increased when the tonnage of the ship demands it.

Cables extend from the forward locomotives and connect with the port and starboard sides respectively of the vessel near the bow and other cables connect the rear locomotives with the port and starboard quarters of the vessel. The lengths of the various cables are adjusted by a special winding drum on the locomotive to place the vessel substantially in mid-channel. When the leading locomotives are started they tow the vessel while the trailing locomotives follow and keep all the cables taut. By changing the lengths of the rear cables, the vessel can be guided; and to stop the vessel, all the locomotives are slowed down and stopped, thus bringing the rear locomotives in action to retard the ship. Therefore, the vessel is always under complete control quite independent of its own power, which is not used, and the danger of injury to the lock walls and gates is consequently very greatly lessened.

The towing tracks have a specially designed rack rail extending the entire length of the track between the rails. It is through this rack that the locomotive exerts the traction necessary for propelling large ships and climbing the steep inclines. When the locomotive reaches one of the inclines between the locks, the grade of which may be as much as 44 per cent, or when it is towing a ship, the cog rail system is utilized to enable the locomotive to climb the grade and in the other case to exert traction necessary for pulling the ships. The cog or rack rail is laid between the track rails and the locomotive is provided with a cog wheel or rack pinion to engage the rail.

A rack rail is also provided on short portions of the return track so as to lower the locomotive safely from one level to the next. The steepest slope is twenty-six degrees, or 44 per cent, hence the need will be seen for rack rail even on the return track, as any traction locomotive with the usual wheel drive, even with the brake set, would begin to slide on a 16 per cent grade and therefore could not be controlled. With a rack rail, however, traction is limited only by the capacity of the driving motors and not by the adhesion of the wheel treads on the rails.

Three-phase 220-volt alternating current is used for operating the locomotives through an underground contact system. A specially designed contact plow slides between two "T" conductors and transmits the power to the locomotive. This contact plow also passes through the slot opening in the conduit cover and is flexibly connected to the locomotive in such a manner as to follow all irregularities in the tracks and crossovers, and therefore insures a continuous supply of power.